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Service filled with heartfelt tributes — Page 12



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Brady says he's done for good— Sports



# St. Croix Avis



USVI 179th YEAR

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75¢

## Dozens of potential airport developers join VIPA Industry Forum



JUDI SHIMEL

ST. THOMAS — Gov. Albert Bryan Jr. and a local leadership team representing tourism, business and economic development welcomed private-sector representatives interested in Virgin Islands airport expansion.

Organizers of Wednesday's Industry Forum say the visitors came from the U.S. mainland, Canada, Europe, and Mexico in response to a Request for Qualifications issued Dec. 29, 2022.

A consultant working with the Port Authority described Wednesday's forum as an informational gathering used to attract potential partners willing to team up with the government to carry out capital projects. About 60 interested parties, representing 33 different companies, appeared on the forum's first day, on St. Thomas, according to consultant Larry Belinsky from Frasca & Associates, LLC. A similar forum is scheduled to take place Thursday on St. Croix at the Henry Rohlsen Airport.

Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte delivered welcoming remarks. He described tourism as the territory's economic driver and voiced support for airport expansion and modernization.

Judi Shimel

Gov. Albert Bryan Jr. shares ideas with potential developers about how modernizing V.I. airports would benefit both them and the territory. Bryan made his remarks at an industry forum held on St. Thomas Wednesday.

VIPA, PAGE 2

## VIEDA launches new homeownership program

M.A. DWORKIN

ST. CROIX — The Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority (VIEDA) has launched a new website for VI Slice Moderate-Income Homeownership Program

in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Moderate-income individuals and families seeking homeownership in the USVI now have a website where they can search for in-depth information about the VI Slice Moderate Income

Homeownership Program. Launched officially by the VIEDA on Jan. 15, the new website [www.vislice.com](http://www.vislice.com), which is also a webpage on the VIEDA website [www.usvieda.org](http://www.usvieda.org) provides information on how the VI Slice

program works, its eligibility requirements, and how an applicant can use the program's funds. It also includes a directory of participating local banking institutions and mortgage companies that allow prospective applicants

to browse and select lenders that are participating in the VI Slice program.

The website also includes a Frequently Asked Questions section.

VIEDA, PAGE 2



# CZM tires for federal monies to manage climate change

LASIBA KNIGHT

ST. CROIX — Climate change and the threat it poses to the territory's shoreline have prompted the Division of Coastal Zone Management (CZM) to consider a wholesale review of its permitting process.

The environmentally focused division is seeking federal aid to fund the review, and on Tuesday announced it had completed an initial report that, if approved, could unlock \$240,000 in total grant funding.

It has been more than 15 years since the Office for Coastal Management (OCM) approved a 309 Assessment and Strategy report produced by the territory. Twice in a decade, national law provides that states and territory's produce the self-assessment,

which gives the localities an opportunity to lobby for increased federal funding to improve their coastal management programs.

Building along the territory's coastline is an attractive prospect for developers keen to cash in on priceless views of the Caribbean Sea, but such projects can come at a cost to the environment. One of the most common, and deleterious, consequences of coastal development is increased levels of runoff. Land-based erosion can cover corals in suffocating blankets of sediment, introduce deadly toxins into the food chain, and lead to increase risk of flooding.

Gaining access to the \$80,000 a year 309 grant would allow CZM to close gaps that currently exist in its permitting framework that lead to environmental harm, the agency stated. And by overhauling

its entire permitting process, the agency will be on a better footing to keep up with a changing climate.

A computer simulation performed by the Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) found that heavy rains in the vicinity of Cyril E. King Airport in St. Thomas caused three guts to carry anywhere from 140% to 397% more runoff to the ocean, than they would have under similar conditions in 1985. The agency concluded that development-driven changes in the area were responsible for the increased runoff.

CZM outlined its three-year strategy for the 309 funding, saying that in the first two years, it would undertake a complete review of its permitting process, and hire a consultant to oversee

the review. Amongst the many elements to be considered, is how to calculate how much of a coastal area's surface area can be taken up with runoff-producing construction.

The earth's unprecedented rapid rise in temperatures post-industrial revolution have contributed to local coastal erosion in two primary ways, stronger, more frequent major hurricanes. And rising sea levels.

The temperature of the waters sounding the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico have risen almost 2 F since 1950, and ocean levels have risen at a rate of about 0.7 inches per decade starting from 1962, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). An analysis of satellite images dating to 1979 conducted by the same agency found that

hurricanes have become stronger worldwide over the last four decades.

Another gap that CZM is aiming to close, is how land use designations affect its ability to regulate coastal areas. The agency's staff have raised concerns that lands designated as agricultural, have seen their uses drastically changed without any input from CZM.

As an example, they point to a wetland parcel that once served as a parking lot due to its proximity to Rainbow Beach, that was converted into a cane field by the Department of Agriculture "without CZM consultation."

"This example highlights a potential management need to clarify the CZM process for other land use designations to ensure wetlands are adequately protected," the report states.

## VIEDA:

FROM PAGE 1

along with a resources link to register for required home-buyer education courses. A Lender's Portal has also been established on the site to be used by participating local banking institutions and mortgage companies so they can work in partnership with the VIEDA for gap financing referrals.

VI Slice originated in October 2022 through a collaboration with the Office of the Governor, Office of Disaster Recovery (ODR) and the VIEDA in partnership with local banking institutions and mortgage companies. The VI Slice

Program is funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021.

"Lieutenant Governor Roach and I, and our Administration, have remained laser-focused on ensuring that we support and help build stronger Virgin Islands families. And there is nothing more central to the core of stronger families than financial resources and the opportunity for homeownership," Gov. Albert Bryan Jr. said. "We did it because we believe in putting people first. We did it because it was the right thing to do and because we believe in building stronger Virgin Islands families," Governor Bryan

remarked when he announced the program at his news conference in October 2022.

VI Slice is a homeownership assistance program that was created to help provide eligible, moderate-income families with up to \$200,000 in gap financing to either buy a home - and rehabilitate a home if required - construct a home on land that is situated or purchased, or to pay towards the down payment and/or closing costs.

"We're enthusiastic about our website having this webpage for the VI Slice Program, our partnership with the Office of the Governor and ODR, as well as

with our partnership with local banking institutions and mortgage companies to assist the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands so that they can get access to affordable housing in the USVI," said VIEDA CEO Wayne Biggs, Jr. "This is also beneficial for economic development in our Territory as it provides more opportunities for people to both live and work locally."

To participate in this program, all eligible individuals must first apply for a conventional mortgage loan through one of the mortgage lenders participating in the VI Slice program. If the mortgage lender discovers a shortfall

in funds between the overall project cost and the amount the applicant secured through a primary lender, the VIEDA provides gap financing through the ARPA grant to bridge the gap.

VI Slice was started through a collaboration with the Office of the Governor, Office of Disaster Recovery, and the Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority in partnership with local banking institutions and mortgage companies. The primary goal of VI Slice is to establish opportunities that may increase homeownership rates amongst moderate income households in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

## VIPA:

FROM PAGE 1

Leaders from the St. Thomas-St. John and the St. Croix Chambers of Commerce spoke of how improved airports can fit into development and restoration projects under way in the V.I. Wayne Biggs from the Economic Development Authority pitched additional benefits private-sector partners may enjoy as part of their partnership agreements with the government.

Port Authority board chairman Willard John and agency director Carlton Dowe spoke next.

"We want to modernize and upgrade our airports, and the opportunity is now," John said. Dowe said he wanted sky bridges to help passengers to easily board onto and disembark from jets.

"No longer will folks have to be lifted in a bread truck in order to board a plane. After this process, we don't expect to be second to any airport, anywhere in the Caribbean," the director said.

Audience members paid close attention as Belinsky presented timelines and proposed deadlines for achieving the steps toward selecting a partner for the projects.

Then the governor asked those interested parties to think of other possibilities they could explore if chosen as an airport development partner. "Welcome to my islands. I hope you pay attention to our opportunities," Bryan said. "I'll be around to answer any questions. I would love to engage and see you become part of our great economic and residential family here in the Virgin Islands."



Judi Shimmel

Gov. Albert Bryan Jr. (third from left) presents local leaders who will aid the plans for airport modernization at a forum held Wednesday at the Cyril E. King Airport. (LEFT TO RIGHT) Willard John, Carlton Dowe, Bryan, Joseph Boschulte, Wayne Biggs, John Woods, Nancy Torres.

# DHS announces SNAP emergency allotments given during Covid will end Feb. 28

**TOM EADER**  
Bureau Chief

ST. CROIX — The federally approved emergency allotments given as a temporary boost to all Virgin Islands households enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program during the COVID-19 pandemic will end on Feb. 28, the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services recently announced.

Due to the 2023 Consolidated Appropriations Act passed by the U.S. Congress on Dec. 29, 2022, the Virgin Islands is required to phase out the additional SNAP benefits households have been

receiving since March 2020, according to a DHS news release issued Tuesday.

February is the last month SNAP recipients will receive the temporary emergency allotments provided throughout the pandemic, the release stated. Beginning in March, all SNAP households will receive their normal monthly benefit as long as they remain eligible based on federal guidelines.

"Since March 2020, our DHS team has worked tirelessly during the public health emergency to ensure 11,000 SNAP households received the maximum benefit, assisting both the families and

the Virgin Islands economy," Human Services Commissioner Kimberley Causey-Gomez said in a statement. "At this time, households should prepare to accommodate this reduction in benefits when the additional temporary emergency allotment ends after the February issuance. As a reminder, the change to your benefit amount is due to the 2023 Consolidated Appropriations Act and the department does not have any control over this federal change."

When the temporary emergency allotment expires on March 1, each SNAP household will again — as was the case before the coro-

navirus pandemic — begin to receive benefits based on the usual factors in determining eligibility, including household size, income and deductions, according to DHS. The benefits each household receives, therefore, will vary based on their current circumstances. Households will receive the decreased SNAP benefit amount on their Electronic Benefits Transfer card. SNAP households do not need to take any action.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service noted the boost to SNAP benefits put in place during the pandemic will end nationwide

after the February issuance because the extra money was a temporary strategy authorized by Congress to help low-income individuals and families deal with the hardships of the pandemic. The Consolidated Appropriations Act recently passed by Congress ends emergency allotment after the February issuance, so all SNAP households' benefits will return to normal amounts by March. The emergency allotments allowed all SNAP households to receive an additional \$95 in benefits, or an additional benefit valued up to the maximum benefit for their household size, whichever value is greater, according to the USDA.

# Weight loss surgery and hypersexuality

ST. CROIX — "Mary Jane," a 65 year old recently retired university professor, recently had bariatric surgery and lost 100 pounds; she recently reconnected with graduate school friends to tell them the news.

Mary Jane was a lifelong binge eater and ballooned to 350 lbs. She was a natural beauty in her youth but gradually put on weight over the years.

Excitedly she told her friends that she has gone on Match.Com to meet men. Even though everyone discouraged her from doing so because of so

many scam artists out there, she didn't listen and gushed about all the fantastic men she was meeting. As soon as she meets them in person she has sex with them, describing it as "four hours of explosive sex" on her couch with a man she just met. She describes another encounter with another man she just met who she went to visit at his house almost immediately after meeting him and the sex was "2 and 1/2 hours of passion."

Of course, everyone is telling her this is risky and exploitative but she is so "high" on her new-

found sexuality that she listens to no one.

Hearing this story, I began to research weight loss surgery and hypersexuality and it turns out that both binge eating and hypersexuality are classified as addictions. When one addiction is taken care of through surgery, the other can emerge. Because characteristics of addictive behaviors are similar by nature, it is common for people to give up one addiction only to incur another. For instance, an alcoholic may stop drinking and develop compulsive gambling.

Unfortunately, weight loss alone may not resolve compulsive behaviors. One unhealthy behavior can be traded for another if underlying issues such as depression and anxiety are not addressed.

Persons seeking weight loss surgery must be evaluated first. If they have unrealistic expectations such as that all their problems will be alleviated once they get the weight loss surgery, they will need to be thoroughly advised that symptom substitution may occur and may be dangerous and the person should be in ongoing therapy as



**Dr. Brinker**

**Dr. Brinker's Sound Advice**

they take this journey. If you have questions or mental health topics to be discussed, you may email Dr. Brinker at [drdianebrinker@gmail.com](mailto:drdianebrinker@gmail.com)

# Montana man arrested for hacking victim's phone, impersonating realtor to stiff closing cost for home purchase

**STEVE BULLOCK**

ST. CROIX — Detectives from the V.I. Police Department Economics Crime Unit arrested a suspect on Monday, charging him with impersonating a St. Croix realtor for the purpose of deceiving a client to wire transfer money to his Bank of America account in the United States, a police official said.

Michael Ellenburg, 74, of Missoula, Montana, was arrested after he was extradited to St. Croix to face charges of obtaining money by false pretenses, grand larceny, and acting in an assumed character, according to VIPD Director of Communications Glen Dratte.

Citing the police report, Dratte said that on Aug. 11, 2020, the Economic Crime Unit initiated an investigation into Ellenburg for alleged fiduciary fraud.

"Their investigation revealed that Ellenburg maliciously hacked into an unknown source, found conversations with the complainant in reference to a closing cost and

then impersonated the realtor, by emailing the complainant and requesting that he wire \$23,003.96 fraudulently to his [Ellenburg's] Bank of America account," Dratte told the St. Croix Avis.

According to VIPD Detective Melissa Rogers, the victim went to the Ancilmo Schrader Command Police Station in Oct. 2019 and filed a criminal complaint alleging that he had been scammed by a suspect who stole over \$23,000 from him.

The victim stated that he was in the process of purchasing a property located in Estate Work and Rest through his realtor and attorney and that they agreed that Oct. 24, 2019, would have been his scheduled closing date in the amount of \$23,003.96.

"[The victim] stated that he was in the process of purchasing a home and received an email from an individual requesting that he wire \$23,003.96 dollars for closing costs," Rogers said.

He further told police that he

then received an email providing wiring instructions to wire the exact amount to "Best Choice Revocable Law Office of Ruth Ann" to a Bank of America account.

After completing the transaction, the man said he discovered that he was scammed, and the funds went to a fraudulent account.

The victim added that after the closing on Oct. 24, 2019, he was contacted by his attorney, advising him that the FlagStar Bank did not receive his deposit and that he was scammed.

A warrant was obtained for Ellenburg's arrest in reference to the alleged crime which was uploaded and posted to the National Crime Information Center database.

On Oct. 7, 2022, police got a break in catching the suspect when a sheriff deputy, on patrol in Missoula, discovered that Ellenburg had an outstanding warrant and took him into custody.

A month later, on Nov. 10, 2022, Ellenburg signed a waiver of extradition, and the United States Marshals Service was contacted to assist the VIPD with extraditing the suspect to St. Croix to face criminal charges.

After he was returned to the island, detectives traveled to the John A. Bell Adult Correctional Facility on Monday where he was being held and formally placed him under arrest without incident.

Bail was set at \$25,000, which the defendant was unable to post and he was remanded to the John A. Bell Adult Correctional Facility pending his advise of rights hearing.

On Monday, Magistrate-Judge Yolanda Brow-Ross found probable cause to charge Ellenburg but continued the hearing until Wednesday to allow his public defender to vet a suitable third-party custodian.

When the hearing resumed on Wednesday, attorney Leslie Davis

told the court that Ellenburg is completely disabled and does not have any friends or relatives on the island who could serve as his third-party custodian and that he has no money to even purchase a plane ticket to return to Montana.

Davis requested that the judge release her client on an unsecured bond and allow him to travel back to Montana.

Brow-Ross said the defendant would have to post 10% of the bail in cash, and upon doing so, the court would entertain future motions that may allow him to return to Montana.

In the meantime, Ellenburg is prohibited from leaving St. Croix without the court's written permission and is barred from having any contacts with the victim or any witnesses in the matter.

Police urged anyone with information on this incident to call 911, or the VIPD on St. Croix at 778-2211. Residents can also call the anonymous tip line Crime Stoppers USVI at 1-800-222-8477.



## Police briefs

### VIPD, VIDE investigating online threats to shoot up St. Croix schools

STEVE BULLOCK

ST. CROIX — The V.I. Police Department and the V.I. Department of Education have launched a joint investigation into threats that were posted on social media to shoot up the John H. Woodson Jr. High School, the St. Croix Educational Complex and the St. Croix Career and Technical Education Center (CTEC) on Monday and Tuesday, respectively.

According to Glen Dratte, the VIPD director of communications, school officials at JHWJHS were notified of a threat that was circulating on social media and the administration took appropriate action to safeguard the students and faculty.

The school was placed on lockdown for several hours while police and other law enforcement officers conducted a check of the campus.

In a phone interview, VIDE Director of Communications Cynthia Graham told the St. Croix Avis that the all-clear was later given at John H. Woodson Jr. High, following the lockdown of the campus due to the "anonymous threat" made to the school.

VIPD officers responded to the scene

and conducted a search of the campus; however, out of an abundance of caution, there was an early dismissal at school.

On Tuesday, Graham confirmed that there was a similar incident at St. Croix Educational Complex and the St. Croix Career and Technical Education Center.

After another search of both campuses, it was determined that the threat was a hoax and the all-clear was given around 10 a.m. and normal school activities resumed.

According to Dratte, a monitor overheard students discussing a social media threat involving an individual who said someone was going to shoot up both the SCEC and CTEC.

"After reviewing the post on a student's cell phone, the monitor alerted the school administration who notified police of the threat," Dratte told the St. Croix Avis.

Dratte said the matter is of grave concern to police and VIDE officials and that the matter was discussed by high-ranking officials — including Police Commissioner Ray Martinez and Education Commissioner Dionne Wells-Hedrington on Wednesday on a special radio program.

"A similar radio program is scheduled for Thursday during which parents will be invited to give their input," Dratte further stated.

Dratte also confirmed that a high-level meeting was held at SCEC on Wednesday involving Police Commissioner Ray Martinez, Police Chief Sean Santos, Education Commissioner Dionne Wells-Hedrington, Acting Attorney General Carol Thomas-Jacobs along with the St. Croix school superintendent and school administrators to discuss the on-going situation.

According to Dratte, school officials have identified at least 12 students from a single class who may have been involved in posting the threat.

"Detectives are presently interviewing these students to try to narrow down the list to the individual who may have been responsible for posting it on social media," he added.

#### Suspect charged with trespassing, contempt of court

Warren Freeman of St. Croix was arrested early on Wednesday and

charged with contempt of court and trespassing, Dratte reported.

Police were dispatched shortly before 1 a.m. to a residence in Estate Clifton Hill in reference to a contempt of court and trespassing incident.

Officers spoke to the female victim, who stated that her brother, whom she identified as Eugene Freeman had trespassed onto the property and was sleeping on the second floor balcony, despite a permanent restraining order against him.

Freeman was instructed to leave the premises and was escorted to a police vehicle, where he was advised of his constitutional rights and placed under arrest.

Bail was not allowed, pursuant to the territory's domestic violence laws, and Freeman was remanded to the Golden Grove Adult Correctional Facility pending his advise of rights of hearing.

Police urged anyone with information to call 911, or the VIPD on St. Thomas and St. Croix at 774-2211 and 778-2211, respectively. Residents can also contact police on St. John at 693-8880 or they may call the anonymous tip line Crime Stoppers USVI at 1-800-222-8477.

## Cocaine smuggler sentenced to more than two years in prison

TOM EADER  
Bureau Chief

ST. CROIX — A District Court judge recently sentenced a 34-year-old drug smuggler caught with three bundles of cocaine at the Cyril E. King Airport on St. Thomas to two years and eight months in prison, U.S.

Attorney Delia Smith announced Monday.

Julio Soto Robles, a Puerto Rico resident who pleaded guilty to possession with intent to distribute cocaine on Aug. 24, 2022, was sentenced Friday, according to a U.S. Attorney's Office news release. Robles must also serve four years of super-

vised release for his conviction of possession with intent to distribute 735 grams of cocaine.

According to court records, on Aug. 18, 2020, Robles and a co-traveler, Gregory Vega, arrived at the St. Thomas airport from Puerto Rico with no luggage, the release stated. During a primary inspection by

U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Robles was found to be in possession of about \$11,000. Robles told CBP officers that the money was to pay for the surgery of a relative.

On Aug. 20, 2020, Robles and his co-traveler returned to CEKA and attempted to board a flight to Puerto Rico, the release stat-

ed. During a secondary inspection, CBP officers searched a suitcase that the two men were carrying and discovered three separate bundles of cocaine.

The case was investigated by CBP and Homeland Security Investigations. It was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Kyle Payne.

## Dolphins, humans both benefit from fishing collaboration

(AP) — A fishing community in southern Brazil has an unusual ally: wild dolphins.

Accounts of people and dolphins working together to hunt fish go back millennia, from the time of the Roman Empire near what is now southern France to 19th century Queensland, Australia. But while historians and storytellers have recounted the human point of view, it's been impossible to confirm how the dolphins have benefited — or if they've been taken advantage of — before sonar and underwater microphones could track them underwater.

In the seaside city of Laguna, scientists have, for the first time, used drones, underwater sound recordings and other tools to document how local people and dolphins coordinate actions and benefit from each other's labor. The most successful humans and dolphins are skilled at reading each other's body language. The research was published Monday in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.



Associated Press

In this 2008 photo, provided by Oregon State University, dolphin jump in front of fishermen at Praia da Tesoura, in Laguna, Brazil. In the seaside city of Laguna, scientists have, for the first time, used drones, underwater sound recordings and other tools to document how people and dolphins coordinate actions and benefit from each other's labor. The research was published, Jan. 30, 2023, in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

The Laguna residents work with wild bottlenose dolphins to catch schools of migratory silver fish called mullet. It's a locally famous alliance that has been recorded in newspaper records going back 150 years.

"This study clearly shows that both dolphins and humans are paying attention to each other's

behavior, and that dolphins provide a cue to when the nets should be cast," said Stephanie King, a biologist who studies dolphin communication at the University of Bristol and was not involved in the research.

"This is really incredible cooperative behavior," she added. "By working with the dolphins," the people catch more fish, "and the dolphins are more successful in foraging, too."

Dolphins and humans are both highly intelligent and long-lived social animals. But when it comes to fishing, they have different abilities.

"The water is really murky here, so the people can't see the schools of fish. But the dolphins use sounds to find them, by emitting small clicks," much as bats use echolocation, said Mauricio Cantor, an Oregon State University marine biologist and study co-author.

As the dolphins herd the fish toward the coast, the people run into the water holding hand nets.

"They wait for dolphins to signal exactly where fish are — the most common signal is what locals call 'a jump,' or a sudden deep dive," said Cantor, who is also affiliated with the Federal University of Santa Catarina in Florianópolis, Brazil.

The researchers used sonar and underwater microphones to track the positions of the dolphins and fish, while drones recorded the interactions from above, and GPS devices attached to residents' wrists recorded when they cast their nets.

The more closely the people synchronized their net-casting to the dolphins' signals, the more likely they were to trap a large catch.

So what's in it for the dolphins? The descending nets startle the fish, which break into smaller schools that are easier for dolphins to hunt. "The dolphins may also take one or two fish from the net — sometimes fishers can feel dolphin tugging a little on the net," said Cantor.